

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

IAFF 288.11

Forward Engagement: The Study of Long-Range Developments as Factors in Contemporary National Policy

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Wednesday, 5:10pm – 7:00pm
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Class meets: 1/16,1/23,1/30,2/6,2/13,2/20,2/27,3/5,3/12,(Spring
Break),3/26,4/2,4/9,4/16,4/23,4/30

Note: All examinations, reports, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with The George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.

Course Mission Statement:

The rate of major historical change is accelerating, in ways that challenge the capacity of democratically governed societies to adapt. To offset this trend, it is vital to combine methods of forecasting with mechanisms for policy making. I call this process “Forward Engagement.” The first principle of “Forward Engagement,” is to encourage early awareness of potentially major trends or events, in order to support earlier actions designed shape them. The objective of this course is to explore how this might be done.

Students will:

- Explore basic forecasting methodologies.
- Apply these methods for the study of potentially major trends and events in science/technology, economics/environment, defense/security, and governance/government.

- Examine complexity theory as a means for understanding interactions among simultaneously unfolding events.
- Examine network theory as a basis for considering how to boost the performance of government in the presence of complex events.
- Examine ways in which to meld long-range assessment and policy, including concepts developed by their predecessors in this class, as well as by various ongoing projects promoted by NGOs..
- Participate in a scenario-based exercise to develop and demonstrate their own approach to Forward Engagement, as applied to a major public issue, including both its domestic and international dimensions.

Methodology:

Readings, lectures, class discussion, individual writings, group work., guest speakers, and **self-initiated** contact with experts.

Grading Output:

Individual papers; group papers; one final collective class paper and a power-point briefing. The briefing is to be delivered to an invited panel of guests, including some who are theoreticians, but may, as in previous classes, include others who have held a senior policy-level responsibility in government. Class performance is also taken into consideration.

Each assignment is due by noon on the day before the corresponding class session. Papers should be emailed to FEpapers@gmail.com; any change in due dates will be announced in class or over email. Expectations for each assignment appear on the following pages

Work Schedule:

The course is arranged in four interlocking blocks, presented below. The presentation of each block begins with a statement of premise, followed by: a layout of the subject matter to be covered in each lecture; work assignment for the intervals of time between lectures, and advice as to the recommended sequence of readings. Where readings are concerned, students will have their own methods. I am suggesting, however, which materials are “best read” as of a certain date.

Block I: Orientation and Introduction to Forecasting

***Premise:** Accelerating events are threatening to overtake the response time of democratic systems of governance. To offset this, we need to make more effective use of forecasting methods in order to shorten our response time. This section surveys standard and advanced forecasting methods.*

■ ***First work interval (from Jan 17th to Jan 22nd):*** Students explore the

SESSION #1 –Jan 16th : Discussion of objectives and organization of the course. Discussion of methodology. Organization of the class into four working groups: science and technology; economics and the environment; defense and security; and governance and society. Establish a “scanning” process (systematic search of publications for ideas about longer-range events). Begin selection of class leader and working group chairs (conclude this during the second session).

Welcome Kit (a CD containing selected readings organized by theme). Students are invited to meet individually with Prof. Fuerth in the opening week—arranged through Justin Zorn.

SESSION #2 –Jan/23rd: First of two presentations by professor on forecasting methodologies, starting with an overview of the field of futures studies, and then focusing on the first two of four basic methods -- prediction and projection

- **Second work interval (Jan 24th to Jan 29th):** Students prepare individual papers on Prediction or Projection (per individual choice). Papers should explore the use of the selected forecasting method in the development of a policy issue. Papers may examine an actual issue, whether in the past or ongoing. Another option is for students to construct and examine a hypothetical, as opposed to an historical case. Students can draw upon papers from earlier classes, for ideas. These papers can be found on Blackboard. **Expectations for Assignment:** Short, 3-4 pp, papers. Assignment is designed to build awareness of how, by their nature, forecasting methods can shape perceptions of events. The only constraint on choice of topic is that students must pick examples that are pertinent to their working groups. Papers are to be e-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on Jan 29th.

Best read by the end of this interval:

Cornish: *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future*

Petersen: *Out of the Blue: Wild Cards and Other Big Future Surprises*

SESSION #3 –Jan 30th: Class discussion with professor of student papers on Prediction and Projection. Professor presents the third and fourth basic forecasting methods -- Delphi method and Scenario. Overview of advanced methods: eg. mathematical, agent-based models.

- **Third work interval (from Jan 31st to Feb 5th):** Students prepare individual papers on forecasting characteristics of Delphi method and Scenarios. Papers should explore the use of one or the other of these forecasting methods in the development of a policy issue. Papers may examine an actual issue, whether past or ongoing. Alternatively, papers can construct and examine a hypothetical case. **Expectations for Assignment:** short, 3-4 pp, papers. The only constraint on selection of topic is that students must pick examples that are pertinent to their working groups. Papers are to be emailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on Feb 4th.

Best read by the end of this interval:

Halal: "The Delphi Method"

<http://home.gwu.edu/~halal/Articles/articles.html> or

<http://www.techcast.org/>

Loescher: *Proteus*: Insights from 2020

Wagner: *Foresight, Innovation, and Strategy*: Toward a Wise Future

Mazarr: *Global Trends 2005* (recommended)

SESSION #4 –Feb 6th : Class discussion of papers on Delphi Method and Scenarios.

Introduction by professor to the concept of Future Contingencies of Interest (FCIs) and "STEEP" method for analyzing and comparing their effects on social systems.

- **Fourth work interval (from Feb 7th to Feb 12th)**: Students prepare individual papers on FCIs, and apply the STEEP methodology to them. Students need to develop only one FCI per person. They should pick FCIs that are pertinent to their working groups' field of interest. Papers are to be e-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on Feb 11th. **Expectations for Assignment**: Short, 4-5pp papers. Assignment is intended to get students to think long-range, look for events that arguably will have transformative impact on society: then, use a method (STEEP) for characterizing the effects. Only constraint on choice of topic is that students must pick examples that are pertinent to their working groups.

Best read by the end of this interval:

"Societal Tsunamis 2006" (Conference Proceedings)

"Societal Tsunamis –Working Groups 2007" (Conference Proceedings)

National Science Foundation Report on Convergence

Weblink: <http://www.wtec.org/ConvergingTechnologies/>

Kurzweil: *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (recommended)

Dyson: *The Sun, The Genome & The Internet* (recommended)

Fukuyama: *Our Post-Human Future* (recommended)

Block II: Complexity

Premise: Trends and events and their impacts on society are highly interactive, and cannot be understood if this characteristic is overlooked. This section presents complexity theory as best method for thinking about the nature of these interactions and their implications for efforts to manage events. _____

SESSION #5 –Feb 13th : Class discussion of student papers on FCIs. Presentation by Professor Fuerth on interactivity among FCIs, and on use of Matrix format to display interactions

- ***Fifth work interval (from 14th to Feb 19th)***: Students, operating within working groups, write individual papers on interactions between FCIs, and collaborate to display results using matrix format. Papers are to be e-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on Feb 19th ***Expectations for Assignment:*** This is a two- part assignment. In the first part, students will suggest ways FCI's interact, presenting their ideas in the form of short papers 2-3pp, using "bullet" format. Students use their own FCIs from Feb 11th paper, plus one or more FCIs suggested by other members of the class. In the second part of the exercise, students will combine their ideas papers into matrix form, as discussed in class. For this portion, students will work as groups. Student "chairs" will guide. Four matrices will emerge.

Best read by the end of this interval:

Bar-Yam: *Making Things Work*

Rosenau: "Many Damn Things Simultaneously: Complexity and World Affairs"

- **SESSION #6 –Feb 20th:** Discussion of matrices prepared by working groups. Presentation of overview by Professor Fuerth on use of "issues" to map out questions embedded in policies. Overview of complexity theory, as source of perspective and insight..

- **Sixth work interval (from Feb 21st to Feb 26th).** Students, operating as working groups, prepare a new version of their respective matrix, highlighting issues. Papers are to be e-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on Feb 25th.

Expectations for Assignment: The purpose of this exercise is to shift thinking from forecasting (assessment of what **may** happen, in the absence of government intervention) to policy (assessment of what **ought** to be considered, if government intervention is considered.). Short papers, 3-4pp, bullet format may be used.

Best read by the end of this interval:

Interactivity Foundation 2006 report

“Welcome Kit CD” readings on Organization & Complexity

SESSION #7 –Feb 27th. Discussion of student papers. Professor presents on policy formation and execution. .

- **Seventh work interval (Feb 28th to March 4th):** Students review past student papers on integration and prepare to present (orally) their preliminary assessments of these proposals. Students will break into two “task forces” (one for the executive branch and one for the Congress) to develop presentations to review earlier ideas relevant to each branch. Presentations to be done in bullet format. E-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by noon on March 3rd.

- **Expectations for Assignment:** Two “task forces” of students develop point papers analyzing past student recommendations for FCI/Policy integration. The purpose of this section is to acquaint class members with progression of thinking by students in previous classes, and to encourage new thinking based on compound, executive/congressional interactions.

Best read by the end of this interval:

Past Student Reports (Welcome Kit or www.forwardengagement.org)

Chapman: *Systems Failure* (Executive Summary)

SESSION #8 –March 5th: Students and professor conduct discussion and critiques of earlier proposals for institutional mechanisms to blend forecasting and policy. Professor presents discussion of complexity theory as framework for thinking about FCIs, Issues, and Policies. Class explores case study of strategic planning in Singapore.


■ ***Eighth work interval (March 6th to March 11th)***; reading period
(complexity)

Best read by the end of this interval:

Axelrod and Cohen: *Harnessing Complexity*

Waldrop: *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order & Chaos*
(recommended)

Introducing Complexity (recommended)

Checkland: *Soft Systems* (recommended) 

Capra: *The Web of Life* (recommended)

SESSION #9 –March 12th, Professor presents on complexity, “legacy” systems for policy-making in the U.S., and system failure.

■ ***Ninth work interval (from March 13th to March 18th)***; read on
networked systems organization

Best read by the end of this interval:

Chapman: *Systems Failure*

"Welcome Kit CD" readings on Organization & Complexity (Continued)

McCarthy et. al., *Network Logic: Who governs in an interconnected world*
(recommended)

[March 19th—Spring Break]

Block III: Networking

Premise: *As discussed in Block II, conventional (“legacy”) forms of organization are failure-prone (i.e. “systems failure”) when confronted by complexity. Both theoretical literature and a growing body of practical application, suggest that networking is an effective way to help organizations deal with complexity and avoid systems failure. Forward Engagement suggests that networked systems may be particularly well suited for the American political and organizational culture. This section looks at the networking concept and discusses its implications for governance.*

SESSION #10 – March 26th: Professor presents on characteristics of interagency system and on networked systems as response to complexity.

- **Tenth work interval: from March 27th to April 1st:** students, under leadership of their chair, organize and prepare for class discussion on practical application of networking theory to problems of upgrading executive and congressional operations under conditions of complexity.

Expectations for Assignment: Students prepare for discussion of networking theory to upgrading of executive branch and legislative branch approaches to complex policy issues

Best read by the end of this interval:

Networked Governance (Conference Proceedings)

Fuerth: *Strategic Myopia: The Case for Forward Engagement*

Kamarck: *The End of Government...As We Know It* (Recommended)

RUNNING THE WORLD (selected chapters)

Project for National Security Reform: Literature Review on Organizational Structure: http://www.pnsr.org/pdf/Organizational_Structure_Literature_Review_draft.pdf

SESSION #11 - April 2nd: Discussion of application of networking theory to practical systems. **Discussion of PNSR, Horizon, Solarium projects.** Professor presents this semester’s scenario as test demonstration of this concept, in light of semester’s work.

Eleventh work interval (April 3rd to April 8th): Students draft loose outline of final report: Full class effort, under guidance of “chair.”

Professor provides oversight and guidance.

Block IV: Upgrading Systems

Premise: *There are practical ways to develop systems that are able to integrate complex information and policy within a networked operational framework. Forward Engagement argues that, although there may be ways to bring this about in a one-step reform, deep systemic change can also be brought about by incremental steps. This section involves a student activity to experiment with ideas about such an approach, as part of a scenario exercise. The scenario will focus on a particular significant complex of public policy issues, to be selected by agreement among students. Results will be presented to a panel of invited guest experts.*

SESSION #12 –April 9th : Discussion of concept paper in loose outline form, with professor.

Twelfth work interval (April 10th to April 15th): Students draft dense outline of final report: Full class effort under guidance of “chair.” Professor provides oversight and guidance.

SESSION #13- April 16th: Discussion of dense draft with professor.

Thirteenth work interval (April 17th to April 22nd): Students create first full draft of final report: Full class effort, under guidance of “chair.” Professor provides oversight and guidance.

SESSION #14 – April 23rd: Discussion of draft paper with professor.

- ***Fourteenth work interval (April 24th to April 29nd):*** Students complete final report w/ executive summary and PowerPoint: Full class effort under guidance of “chair.”

The report is to be e-mailed to FEpapers@gmail.com by 11:00pm. Dec 10th

The Scenario

Forward Engagement Spring 2008

A national election has taken place, and preparations are underway for inaugurating the new President. A Transition Office has been established, and is well underway in its task of helping the President Elect assemble a team to run the government, and of readying that team for its responsibilities, which begin with plans to convert the President-elect's signature themes from the campaign into action. In the course of the campaign, the candidates of both parties – to their own surprise – stumbled into agreement on one point: something needed to be done urgently to better equip the government of the United States to handle, major, concurrent challenges to fundamental assumptions about the capacity of governance itself to guide the nation's destiny. . The outlines of this change are understood to involve a new way of looking at oncoming issues, and of appreciating the implications of their complexity; combined with a new way of organizing a national response.

There is a strong expectation that the next Congress will push this process hard, as a way to reverse rock-bottom public ratings of Congress' record over an extended period of time. Important members of both parties have picked up on the need to respond to an extremely sour and pessimistic public mood: one that had that had surprised them by its intensity, and by its apparent indifference to party ideologies on either side. There was talk of the need for an overhaul of some kind, and a bipartisan group of some of the most influential members was known to be working on plans for legislation that was said to involve the most important changes the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, which marked a fundamental reform of how the Executive Branch manages war. Except this time, the focus was not the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but the Office of the President, itself, and how it manages the country. .

The President-Elect agrees with all this in principle, but intends to lead this process, rather than to follow in the wake of a Congressional initiative, and so has proposed a counter-initiative: to use the White House as a test-bed for new concepts. The President-Elect's initiative is to establish an ad hoc arrangement centered in the White House, with instructions to jump-start the incorporation of new methods. The question is how: and in order to think this through, the President-Elect has established a task-force comprised of the most-trusted associates within the Office of Transition, some of whom may well end up operating at Cabinet-level in the new administration. .

The President-Elect has asked this group to think through the simplest and most direct paths towards redesigning White-House operations that guide the formation and execution

of policy. One of the President-Elect's inner circle has introduced an additional level of specificity to the instruction: the task force is specifically asked to design an approach based on the application of complexity analysis for policy issues, and of applied networked systems for policy development and execution. This system is to depend on finding new ways to use established components of the Office of the President; and of the Cabinet. During the design phase, a limited number of "stakeholders" will participate as sources of counsel. Stakeholders are selected NGOs, governors of states (operating through an existing umbrella organization), and members of the Congress. The working group's report should show how their approach would be applied in the case of a specified policy "cluster." It should also show how to create a capacity for learning from error, as a fundamental attribute of the proposed system.

Memorandum

TO: Transition Team on Networked Governance
FROM: Director of Policy Planning: Transition Office

The team's December 13th, 2007 presentation of its findings in response to the President-Elect's request went very well. But the reviewers comments make clear also that there is more work to be done before your concept is ready for decision. I've taken the liberty of converting the verbatim record of their exchange with the Team into a set of basic questions.

- **The report used a definition of national security that the reviewers felt might be too broad, although they recognized that the present definition may be too narrow. They wanted a definition of the scope of the term "national security." There was a suggestion at the time that "national security" and national defense" are concepts that should be separated, and that looks like a good move, but it still leaves the question open. Is "national security" an open-ended concept that expands to embrace all manner of issues not relating to the primary task of defense? And if so, what are the appropriate boundaries?**

- **In any event, reviewers felt that the presentation was excessively heavy on threats to national security (however defined), as opposed to opportunities. Was this asymmetry just a reflection of how the real world presents itself? Or was it an inadvertent distortion, owing to the personal views and group dynamics of the Team? There appears to be room here for more thinking about how the term national security should encourage a search for ways to promote positive developments, in addition to ways to minimize loss.**

- **The reviewers pointed out another asymmetry: they were impressed with the ability of the proposed system to identify issues and inter-actions among issues;**

but they felt that the report did not demonstrate a similar ability to excel at formulating solutions.

- On the operational side, reviewers wanted to know how the proposed new system for dealing with “complex priorities,” would relate to the existing interagency process, especially to the Principles and Deputies committees as presently understood. A related question was how this system would influence management of resources (eg. Via the Office of Management and Budget).
- There was a significant question about metrics for success. One of the reviewers pointed out that the Department of Defense has had “hundreds” of cross-cutting committees, with little to show for the effort. The real issue he appears to be raising is how to assure that such organizations are able to exert more effective pressure for change in the way the parent organization functions, and how to measure such change.
- The reviewers were impressed by the weight the report placed on indoctrinating senior level officials into a new form of White House operation created to deal with “complex priorities.” The question they raised was whether it would be necessary to provide training for the bureaucracy at large, and if so, how? In short, how to change the culture of governance – an issue related to the question of measures of merit, above.
- Finally, one of the reviewers felt that setting up a new locus for long-range, complex planning and operations could work, unless a new institutional identify could be established among the participants. The suggestion was that the traditional paper-memo system be replaced by more rapid electronic communications – perhaps along the lines of a WIKI based system – to create the virtual effect of a continuing, intense interaction among the participants.